

BBC Learning English
Words in the news
3rd December 2008
Boy in Congo saved by mobile phone



A doctor has saved the life of a teenage boy in the Democratic Republic of Congo by amputating his shoulder. He'd never performed the operation before - so, using his mobile phone, he had to text a colleague in Britain asking for instructions. Rob Norris reports:

It's unclear how the sixteen year old boy lost his left arm - some reports say he was fishing with a **harpoon** when he was attacked by a hippopotamus, although it's also **emerged** that he'd been **caught up** in fighting between government and rebel forces in the east of Congo.

When a British doctor found him in hospital in the town of Rutshuru, the wound had become badly infected and gangrenous. The doctor, who works for the charity Medecins Sans Frontieres, knew that the boy would die within days if he didn't **take action**.

The only way to save him was to perform what's called a forequarter amputation - which means removing the collar bone and the shoulder blade. The doctor, David Nott, knew of only one surgeon in Britain who had **the expertise** to do it. So, as he explained to the BBC, he sent his colleague a text message:

DAVID NOTT: Almost immediately he texted me back - the procedure, how to do it step by step. And obviously you have to think for twenty-four hours really whether this is the right thing or not, you know, a little boy in the middle of the Congo with one arm - because it's an enormous operation. In the UK, you'd need an **intensive care** unit and an **HDU** unit to do it, and so it was a **huge undertaking**.

It's all the more remarkable because the doctor was working in a very basic operating theatre, with just one pint of blood for **transfusion**.

Since he underwent the amputation in October, the boy has **made an extraordinary recovery**.

Rob Norris, BBC

Vocabulary and definitions

a harpoon	a long heavy sharp weapon, similar to a spear, that is fixed to a rope and used for killing certain animals living in water
emerged	become known
caught up	involved (in something bad)
take action	do something
the expertise	the knowledge and experience
intensive care	the monitoring and treatment of seriously ill or injured patients
HDU	short for 'high dependency unit', a medical department that provides life support or organ support in patients who are critically ill
a huge undertaking	a very difficult task
transfusion	when blood that has been taken from one person is put into another person's body (usually after an accident or during an operation)
made an extraordinary recovery	become well again quite quickly, even though it wasn't certain this would happen

More on this story: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/7761994.stm>

Read and listen to the story and the vocabulary online:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/newsenglish/witn/2008/12/081203_congo_amputation.shtml